



“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant”

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Matius 18:21-35

Dear brethren, we're so glad to be with you. Even though I don't know many of you personally, there's something in a bit recent about every one of you. All of you have been hurt by somebody. Every one of you have some issues in life that is hard to forgive. So, we all have to deal with hurt, and we all have to deal with learning to forgive. When we pray the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." So, forgiveness is not optional for Christians, but we know forgiveness is hard. C.S. Lewis writes, "Everyone thinks that forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have someone to forgive." Another author said that "Unforgiveness is poison we drink, thinking that others will die." Now, the bible clearly state we should forgive. But today we are going to focus on The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant that gives us a picture of what are our forgiveness should look like.

Typically, Jesus's parables have one point to make, one clear purpose, and the point of this parable is that as forgiven people, we should forgive others. And the part that we read, first of all, declares to us as a reminder, that we have been forgiven much. Jesus illustrates how much we have been forgiven in this parable. Each of us owe a debt that we cannot pay. And I would challenge you today, do you see your sin as being as big as Jesus said in this parable. There are many people in the world who think, "Well, I do some bad things, but I also do some good things, maybe the good things are more than the bad things." But Jesus tells us that our debt is far greater than we can ever repay with our good works. Isaiah reminds us that all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. Jesus, through this parable, is illustrating just how great our sin is, at the expression of 10,000 talents. In a typical calculation, that should amount to about 10 billion US Dollars. Now this is obviously a hyperbole, but it is to make a point that we owed a debt that was infinitely beyond we could ever imagine repaying ourselves. It's also a reminder from scripture that you must see your sin

as how God sees your sin. If you don't acknowledge how great your sin is, God cannot forgive you. 1 John 1:8 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But then verse 9 says, "If we confess our sin, then God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now there's something in the details of the parable that I believe the reality of the Gospel is better than the illustration. In the parable, the slave says, "Be patient and I will repay you everything." If you have 10 billion dollars on your credit card bill, could you really say to the bank, be patient, I can repay that. And yet interestingly, the master gave him better than what he asked. He asked for more time to pay the debt, but the master forgave the debt. No payment was made. And of course, this is a picture of how God has forgiven us. Actually, what we receive in Christ is even better than this parable. God has been more gracious to you even than the master in this parable to his servant. The servant has a very great debt and then it went to zero. But Titus 3:3-7 says that we have been made heirs. That's what God has done for us in Christ. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "so that you by his poverty might become, not debt free, but rich." And so, the key thing according to this parable, to forgiving others is to remember God's grace to you when He forgave you.

Jesus is the very lamb of God who's taken away the sin of the world, through His death for us. He has taken our guilt upon Himself. It is His perfect righteousness that has been counted to us. These are not just the factual truth; they're meant to be life transforming truth. Have you experienced God's forgiveness, perhaps you have felt great debt of your sin, perhaps you've been sexually immoral, perhaps you have an abortion, perhaps you've hurt somebody very badly. Perhaps you made an idol out of money rather than serving God, perhaps you are self-righteous, and in your

pride, you thought you are a good person. And you fail to confess that you fail to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, you fail to love your neighbor as yourself. You are not a good person. Paul thought he was a good person. But when he met Christ, he realized that he was the chief of sinners, and he needed a Savior. You can't pay the debt of your sin, but Christ has come to pay the debt of all who believed in Him. And since I don't know each one of you, I want to make an appeal to you, if you believe in this gospel today, repent of your sin and believe in Christ. God offered you free forgiveness today. Perhaps you are even a Christian, but you've slipped away from doing the things you know right. Perhaps you've been sliding into some kind of secret sin. God has not forsaken you, He invite you to come, like the father of the prodigal son, He will welcome you, He will receive you with compassion, and He will grant you abundant pardon. So, in summary for the first part, we have been forgiven very much.

Now we come to a point in parable, which is that we who have been forgiven much, must forgive others. Now, one thing that you may not notice when you read to this passage, is that it acknowledges the fact that forgiveness can be hard, that forgiveness can be costly. The debt of the second servant was 100 denarii. Now a denarius was a day's wage. If you multiply that by a hundred, it will probably be a-third of what you made in a year. For many people, that should be at least tens of thousands of dollars. So, if someone owed you tens of thousands of dollars, would you find it hard just to forgive them? It's not a small amount, unless you compare it with the other amount. But I think it's an acknowledgment that some of you have been called on to forgive very hard things, maybe someone you trusted lied to you. Someone took advantage of you financially, someone said hurtful things about you and gossip about you. Someone made promises upon which you relied and then they broke those promises. Sometimes forgiveness can be extremely difficult.

My wife and I counselled in many cases where there has been adultery in marriage. And even if the guilty person repents, forgiveness can be very difficult. But Jesus is saying that forgiveness is not optional for forgiven people, the one that has

forgiven you of a great debt has asked you to forgive others, not because they deserved it, but for His sake. He is asking you to show mercy not because they deserve it, but rather because of what He has done for you. Now there's also a warning. The warning comes in verse 35, that if someone would not forgive, it shows they really disconnecting themselves from the gospel of Christ. Now, we don't earn our salvation by forgiving others, nor can we lose our salvation if we don't forgive others. The idea is if you really understand and believe the gospel, you will be a forgiving person. The gospel is not just something intellectual to be understood. The gospel is life transforming and the gospel is powerful, the gospel gives us the power to forgive when it's very hard. Paul says in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God and Christ also have forgiven you." So, the last phrase there, he says "you're to put off all the hateful anger that we're tempted to express, but instead be kind or be forgiving." And the point is all forgiveness of each other should resemble God forgiveness of us. God forgave us when we ask Him to forgive us, so forgiveness freely granted to the one who asks. It cancels a debt. I think it's important that we say, I forgive you.

Now, sometimes people have misunderstandings about forgiveness. There's an expression in English, "forgiving is forgetting." In Jeremiah 31:34 God says in the new covenant He will remember our sins no more. Now that doesn't mean that God doesn't remember that you sin. He is omniscient, He knows everything. It means that He does not remember them against you anymore. He treats us as if we had never done it. When you forgive someone, you will not forget what they did if it hurts you a lot. But you'll never hold it or use it against them. If you start thinking about the hurt, you'll turn your thought away to God's mercy to you and stop thinking about what they did to you. If you've forgiven them, you won't keep reminding them of the bad thing they did to make them feel bad. If you've forgiven them, you won't go tell everybody else how bad are the things that they did to you. If you've forgiven them, it means

you're going to want to restore the relationship as far as it is possible.

Now, some people have questions about forgiveness, "What if I don't feel like forgiving?" The answer is, forgiveness is not a feeling, forgiveness is a decision. You don't forgive because you feel like forgiving, you forgive because you believe that's what God would have you to do. Sometimes when I'm counselling people, someone will say, "Well, I thought I forgave him, but I'm still upset, so I must not have forgiven him." And the answer is no, you forgave him, but now the burden is on you to live out that forgiveness. Forgiveness is like a decision where you make a promise to treat them as forgiven. And sometimes that can be very hard work to fight the thoughts that tempt you. Some people will say, "Well, if I forgive someone, does it mean that I still have to be close to them and nothing changes?" And I would say, "that is the ideal scenario, but there can be some exceptional situations." And even in the Bible, forgiveness does not always eliminate consequences of sin. The best-known example would be King David. In 2 Samuel 12 when Nathan confronted him about his sin, David repented. And Nathan declared that God had forgiven him, but there were many hard consequences in the life of David and his family in the nation. So, ordinarily we want to completely and freely forgive without consequences, but there are some exceptional circumstances where there will be consequences.

There are two more important questions that people often ask about forgiveness. First question is, what if I have a hard time forgiving myself? My answer is there's nothing in the Bible about forgiving ourselves. Forgiveness is about us as guilty sinners seeking forgiveness from God. And the person who is all obsessed about self-forgiveness is putting his own judgment above that of God. What matters is God's judgment of your sin to be forgiven, not your own judgment. Some people said that they have a hard time forgiving themselves, but really, it's a shame and it's a pride. "I can't believe I did that immoral thing; I just can't forgive myself, I'm better than that." No, you're not better than that. You're worse than that. You're far more sinful than you know. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Seek God's forgiveness, rest in God's forgiveness, and enjoy the peace that it gives.

The other big question people ask is, "What if people who hurt me never seek my forgiveness?" And I'm sure there are many people here who are in that situation. The person who wounded you in a relationship or betrayed you never admitted they did anything wrong. And I want you to read Luke 17:3, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." To summarize, I think the Bible teaches that we approach forgiveness in two different senses. We should have an attitude of forgiveness and a heart of forgiveness towards all people, even those who have not repented. But we cannot be reconciled in full forgiveness to someone who doesn't repent. Whom does God forgive? Does God forgive people who don't repent? We already read 1 John 1:8, if people deny that they're sinners, they're not saved. And so, if someone has wronged you and they haven't sought your forgiveness, that doesn't mean you should be bitter or angry. You can have a forgiving attitude just like Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When Steven was being stoned on the book of Acts, he said, "Lord, do not hold this against them." You could be kind to them, you can pray that someday they will repent before God and with you. Perhaps like the father of the prodigal son, you're looking down the road hoping to see him coming to you someday. You're not angry and bitter. You would weep and rejoice and hug him if he came. And if they've hurt you, you also just have to entrust their punishment or their judgment into God's hands if they don't repent. 1 Peter 2:23 says, "Jesus when he was reviled, did not revile in return but entrusted himself to him who judges righteously." So, you can overcome bitterness by realizing it's not ours to take revenge, it's up to God.

But then there is transactional forgiveness. Luke 7:3 says, "if your brother sins rebuke him; and if he repents forgive him." This kind of forgiveness is conditioned upon them repenting. And this is something beautiful that happens in Christian relationships. In the church, we sin against each other, as we're sinners. In marriage and family, the gospel empowers us so that when we're guilty, we

seek each other's forgiveness and empowers us to forgive others. This should be happening in our families and our churches. And it's something beautiful when it does, but you can't reconcile a relationship by yourself. There is a book that I read some years ago called "Unbroken." It's a story of an American named Louis Zamperini and he was taken captive by the Japanese during World War II. And for years he was brutally tortured, and he was finally released after the war. A few years later God saved him at a Billy Graham rally in Los Angeles. Before God's saved him, he was an angry and bitter man. People today would say he had post-traumatic stress, he was drunk, he was angry, but when God saved him, he became a gracious man. And he started making trips to Japan to preach the gospel, trying to find the very guards who had tortured him. There was one particular guard that was nicknamed the bird. He was the worst, and when Zamperini was 81 years old, he went to Japan just to try to meet the bird to offer him full forgiveness in Christ. But this man, the bird, would not see Louis Zamperini. You can't produce peace and reconciliation by yourself. Some of you may have relationships like that, when you're sad because you would be willing to forgive, but they won't repent. You can have an attitude of grace and forgiveness, but you can't always make peace alone. Romans 12:18 says, "as far as is possible with you to be at peace with all men." But humanly speaking is not always possible.

I have one more story from World War II. When Caroline and I were in college, we heard a lady named Corrie ten Boom speak. When she was younger, during the war in Holland, she and her sister had hidden the Jews from the Nazis in Holland. They were caught and they were put in a prisoner camp. And she and her sister were horribly treated and shamed. The male guards were very wicked, to the point where her sister died in the prison camp. And so, Corrie ten Boom tells a story where after the war, she was visiting Germany. She spoke to a group; at the back of the room, she saw one of the guards. And she remembered him very well, like her blood ran cold. So, when her talk was over this man came forward. He didn't remember her, she was one of the thousands of prisoners probably, but she

remembered him. And he came up and said, "I was so glad to hear you talk about Jesus Christ. I know I did many sinful things, but I found forgiveness in Christ. But since you were there, I want to ask you a question, will you forgive me?" And Corrie ten Boom says that in her mind just in the few seconds, she had so many thoughts. She could remember the torture, remember her sister died, but she also remembered how much she had been forgiven of her many sins. She also reminded herself that forgiveness is a decision, not just a feeling. So, she says by faith she reached out her hand, and she said "Yes, brother I forgive you." And she said it was like electricity between them. She knew the power of the gospel, perhaps as never before. We have been forgiven much. We who have been forgiven much are empowered to forgive others. If the Lord's supper today reminds us how much we've been forgiven and calls us to reflect that forgiveness to others.